



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

R3 Regional Office

333 Broadway SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
FAX (505) 842-3800
V/TTY (505) 842-3292

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Route To:

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Subject: Proposed FY 2006 Forest Health Protection Project, El Rito Ranger District

To: Forest Supervisor, Carson National Forest

On October 6, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Dave Lawrence (El Rito RD) to examine the proposed FY 2006 Puertecito insect and disease prevention/suppression project area on the El Rito RD. This area is located at the southern end of the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit (VFSYU), about three miles south of the community of Vallecitos. Like the nearby Jarita Ranch project (funded in FY 2005), this area was designated for non-commercial thinning under the Agua/Caballos analysis.

Stands comprising this 130 acre area are predominantly ponderosa pine, with minor amounts of Douglas-fir, white fir, and Rocky Mt. Juniper. These stands (and many other stands in this portion of the VFSYU) have not been logged for at least 50 years ago, and contain a significant component of mature and overmature pine. However, most trees are 70 to 80 years old; these were thinned to approximately 10-foot spacing 20 to 25 years ago. (Prior to this thinning, densities easily exceeded 2000 stems/acre.) Site quality is good, with estimated site indices of 80 to 85.

Basal areas exceed 150 ft²/acre throughout most of the area, with a majority consisting of trees 6 to 12" dbh. Although relatively little recent tree mortality was observed, these stands are clearly overcrowded and becoming increasingly susceptible to bark beetle outbreaks. Ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe occurs in scattered infection centers, but is light overall. (We agreed to exclude a 13 acre stand on the east side of Puertecito Canyon where infection is more extensive and site quality lower.)

We agreed to thin trees up to 10" dbh to an average 20-foot spacing, varying spacing to favor the better dominant and codominant stems. Ideally, trees up to 12" would be thinned here; however, a 10" inch limit appears to be a good compromise to achieve desired conditions and limit the amount of slash. Lightly infected (DMR 1-2) trees greater than 5" dbh would be retained where they are the best available leave trees. All infected trees less than 5" dbh should be felled. Sapling groups (trees up to 10-12 feet tall) would be thinned to an average 10-foot spacing, in order to retain more of these young trees.

This treatment should improve stand growth and vigor, reducing future losses to both bark beetles and dwarf mistletoe. We recommend that the thinning be conducted between mid-July and mid-December to reduce the potential for an outbreak of *Ips*. Road conditions between Vallecitos and the project area will probably preclude public interest in removing the cut material for firewood. For this reason (at least until markets are available for removal of small-diameter trees) we suggest that future thinning projects be located in more accessible areas.



Please contact Dave Conklin if you have questions about this evaluation.

/s/ Debra Allen-Reid
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc:
Diana M Trujillo
David E Lawrence
Leonard Lucero
Timothy Fruits
John Anhold